

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3822

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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (TEXT)

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PBOR PFOR SS SP MR AG MR

SUBJECT: SPANISH SAHARA - RECENT INCIDENT AND MAURITANIAN
RESPONSE

REF: A. NOUAKCHOTT 917 B. MADRID 3358 C. RABAT 2395

1. IN SHARP CONTRAST TO RELUCTANCE OF SPANISH EMBOFF TO
SHARE INFORMATION ABOUT LAST WEEK'S INCIDENT IN SPANISH
SAHARA, SPANISH AMBASSADOR ANDRADA RESPONDED TO AMBASSADOR'S
DIRECT INQUIRY WITH HOUR AND QUARTER DETAILED EXPOSITION OF
PROBLEM, COMPLETE RUN-DOWN ON RECENT INCIDENT, AND FULL
REVIEW OF ICJ DEVELOPMENTS. BEFORE MAKING EXPLICIT REQUEST
FOR INFORMATION, AMBASSADOR EMPHASIZED THAT USG CONTINUED
TO ADHERE TO POSITION OF STRICT NEUTRALITY ADOPTED EARLIER
ON SPANISH SAHARA QUESTION. HE NOTED, HOWEVER, THAT EMBASSY
NONETHELESS HAD CONTINUED RESPONSIBILITY TO KEEP WASHINGTON
INFORMED. ALSO, SINCE SPANISH EMBOFF HAD EVIDENCED SPECIAL
INTEREST IN FACT GIRM HAS NEVER RAISED SPANISH SAHARA WITH
EMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT, AMBASSADOR REITERAZED STATEMENT TO
ANDRADA, AND THEN OBSERVED THAT GIRM FOREIGN MINISTER
MOUKNASS HAD ADDRESSED SAHARA MATTER ONLY ONCE IN PAST
YEAR (ON OCCASION OF ORIENTATION VISIT BY DEPT OFF LAST
JANUARY) AND THEN ONLY IN POLITICAL SCIENTIST TYPE

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PRESENTATIONTAND ANALYSIS OF PROBLEM.

2. ANDRADA PROVIDED FOLLOWING ROUND-UP ON RECENT INCIDENT
(ICJ DEVELOPMENTS REPORTED SEPTTEL):

A. NUMBER OF SAHARAN ENLISTED MEN IN TERRITORIAL GUARD
UNIT WHO ARE MEMBERS OF F POLISARIO (WHICH ACCORDING TO
ANDRADA HAS BEEN BANKROLLED AND ARMED BY LIBYAN ARAB
REPUBLIC) TURNED ON SPANISH AND SAHARAN COMMAND STRUCTURE
OF UNIT, AND AFTER WRESTING COMMAND CONTROL FROM SUPERIORS,

MADE TWO SPANISH LIEUTENANTS, TWO SPANISH SERGEANTS AND
FOUR SPANISH ENLISTED MEN PLUS SEVERAL SAHARAN NCOS PRISONER.
AFTER RELEASING UNRECORDED NUMBER OF SAHARAN ENLISTED
PERSONNEL, F POLISARIO MEMBERS LOADED EQUIPMENT AND
PRISONERS INTO UNIT'S LANDROVERS AND HEADED SOUTH TOWARD
MAURITANIA. RELEASED ENLISTED MEN MADE THEIR WAY BACK
TO SPANISH CAMP AND REPORTED INCIDENT TO SPANISH SUPERIORS.

B. UPON RECEIPT INITIAL REPORT OF INCIDENT, ANDRADA
IMMEDIATELY OBTAINED APPOINTMENT WITH MAURITANIAN FOREIGN
MINISTER TO REQUEST GIRM TO TAKE URGENT STEPS TO LOCATE
FLEEING MILITANTS AND EIGHT SPANISH PRISONERS.

C. IN RESPONSE, TO GOS REQUEST, GIRM COMMANDEERED AIR
MAURITANIE DC-4 (REF A) AND DISPATCHED SOME 67 ARMED
TROOPS TO NORTH.

D. DAY OR SO LATER, MOUKNASS INFORMED ANDRADA THAT
MAURITANIAN MILITARY HAD FOUND TRAIL OF MILITANTS AND
HAD FOLLOWED IT TO ALGERIAN FRONTIER. HE DECLARED GIRM
WAS SATISFIED GROUP WAS NO LONGER IN MAURITANIA, ALTHOUGH
IT HAD CLEARLY CIRCLED THROUGH GIRM TERRITORY. (AT THIS
POINT GIRM RECALLED SIGNIFICANT NUMBER OF ITS TROOPS TO
NOUAKCHOTT.

E. MOUKNASS TOLD ANDRADA THAT WHILE GIRM HAD
NOT TAKEN FORMAL DECISION, HE HAD PERSONALLY CONCLUDED THAT IF
MAURITANIAN MILITARY OR SECURITY AUTHORITIES CHANCED TO
COME UPON SPANISH PERSONNEL, GIRM SHOULD IMMEDIATELY HAND
THEM OVER TO SPANISH EMBASSY HERE AND FACILITATE THEIR
RAPID AND QUIET EXIT FROM COUNTRY. ANDRADA DECLARED THAT IF
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SPANISH CAPTIVES SHOWED UP ON HIS DOORSTEP AT SOME POINT
EITHER COURTESY OF GIRM OR UNDER THEIR OWN POWER, HE
PLANNED TO SHIP THEM OUT TO SPAIN ON FIRST AVAILABLE AIRPLANE.
F. DESPITE FACT THAT PRISONERS ARE NOW BEING HELD IN
ALGERIA AND ENCAMPMENT LOCATED APPROXIMATELY 70 KILOMETEE
SOUTH OF TINDOUF, ANDRADA OS NOT DISCOUNTED POSSIBILITY
THEY MAY YET APPEAR IN NOUAKCHOTT.

G. LATEST INFORMATION AVAILABLE TO ANDRADA AS OF MAY 19 INDICATES SPANISH PRISONERS ARE SAFE AND WELL. HE BELIEVES SPANIARDS WERE TAKEN TO BE SURFACED AND EXHIBITED TO INTERNATIONAL PRESS CORPS AT SOME POINT AS "PROOF" THAT F POLISARIO IS RESPONSIBLE POLITICAL ORGANIZATION WHICH HAD BEEN FORCED INTO ACTIVELY AND SUCCESSFULLY FIGHTING SPANISH COLONIALISTS. SINCE PROPAGANDA AIMS OF MILITANTS WOULD MUZYNE SERVED BY DEAD OR OBVIOUSLY WORKED-OVER PRISONERS, ANDRADA BELIEVES MILITANTS WILL NOT RPT NOT HARM MEN, BARRING UNFORSEEN CONFRONTATION WITH AUTHORITIES OF ONE OF COUNTRIES INVOLVED. HE CITES FACT THAT MEN ARE ALIVE AND WELL ONE WEEK AFTER CAPTURE AS SUPPORT FOR HIS VIEWPOINT, AND NOTES THAT ANY ROUGH STUFF AT THIS LATE DATE WOULD TRANSFORM PUBLIC IMAGE OF F POLISARIO FROM GROUP OF RADICAL, YOUTHFUL BUT UNDERSTANDABLE ANTI-COLONIALISTS INTO BAND OF TERRORIST BUTCHERS.

3. ANDRADA BELIEVES ALGERIANS MAY WELL PERMIT F POLISARIO &4970 59 74*-:3 8, ,3-4 *75743 -,\$ 3/#8?85 0-,8 # 048 9,34 . SUCH DISPLAY WOULD BOTH BURNISH ALGERIA'S IMAGE AS SUPPORTER OF ANTI-COLONIAL LIBERATION MOVEMENTS AND REINFORCE AND SUPPORT GOA'S ASSERTION THAT IT IS INTERESTED PARTY IN SAHARA DISPUTE BY VIRTUE OF ITS GEOGRAPHICAL POSITION AND ITS COMMON FRONTIER EVEN THOUGH IT HAS NO HISTORIC CLAIMS AND COVETS NO REAL ESTATE. ON YHER HAND, GOA (IN ANDRADA'S VIEW) MAY DECIDEVUTO PURSUE DIFFERENT COURSE AND TELL MILITANTS THEY CAN REMAIN IN ALGERIA ONLY IF THEY REFRAIN FROM POLITICAL ACTIVITY. IN THAT EVENT, GROUP MAYHJELP RE-ENTER MAURITANIA IN SEARCH EITHER OF POLITICAL SPONSOR OR MORE SIMPLY OF A WAY OUT OF A JAM.

4. JUDGING FROM ANDRADANS ACCOUNT, GOS IS REASONABLY
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RELAXED ABOUT INCIDENT, CONFIDENT OF FUTURE OF PRISONERS, AND THOROUGHLY SATISFIED WITH ROLE MAURITANIANS HAVE PLAYED TO DATE IN THIS AFFAIR.

5. COMMENT: JUDGING FROM ANDRADA'S ACCOUNT AND OTHER, ALBIET SUDTCHY, INFORMATION AVAILABLE NOW, GIRM HAS HANDLED SAHARA INCIDENT (AND SUBSEQUENT OVERZEALOUS SPANISH INVASION THREAT) WITH COMPETENCE AND DESPATCH, AND IN CHARACTERISTICALLY QUIET FASHION. GIRM HAS NOT PUBLICIED EITHER INCIDENT OR ITS ACTIONS. IN BROADER CONTEXT, ALTHOUGH

GIRM HAS ALLOWED SPANISH SAHARA LIBERATION GROUPS TO OPERATE COVERTLY IN NORTHERN MAURITANIA, GIRM PERMISSION APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN GIVEN ONLY ON CONDITION PRESENCE OF GROUPS WOULD NOT BE OVERTLY KNOWN AND THEIR ACTIVITES

WOULD NOT EMBARRASS MAURITANIAN GOVERNMENT. OVERT USE OF
MAURITANIAN TERRITORY BY SAHARAN LIBERATION GROUPS COULD
INVITE SPANISH REPRISALS, THEREBY EXPOSING GIRM
INABILITY BOTH TO PERSIST SPANISH COUNTERACTION AND TO CONTROL
GUERRILLAS, SINCE GIRM CONTROL OF VAST NORTHERN REGION
IS TENUOUS AT BEST. FINALLY, IN VIEW OF GIRM'S COOPERATIVE
STANCE AND ITS EFFECTIVE PERFORMANCE IN RECENT INCIDENT,
SPANISH MAY WELL BE EVEN MORE DISPOSED TO CONSIDER VIEWS
OF MAURITANIA IN RESOLUTION OF SPANISH SAHARA DISPUTE. HANDYSIDE

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